The Ingersoll Museum is proud to be a founding attraction of the Freethought Trail! In the 19th century west-central New York was a hotbed of social, political and religious innovation. Fayetteville suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage called religion the enemy of women. Writing from Elmira, Mark Twain raised irreverence to an American art form. At Ithaca, Andrew Dickson White co-founded Cornell University, the nation’s first secular institution of higher learning. In 1848 reformers and freethinkers of every stripe thronged Seneca Falls to demand new roles for women. Corning native Margaret Sanger led the 20th-century birth control movement. Online at www.freethought-trail.org (note the brethren), the informal Freethought Trail now includes about eighty sites, marked and unmarked. All are within a two-hour drive of the Ingersoll Museum and all pertain to the region’s rich history of radical reform: freethought, women’s rights, abolitionism, sex radicalism, anarchism, and more. Visiting west-central New York this summer or fall? Let the Freethought Trail site be your guide to a fascinating, historical, and fuel-efficient visit.

JOIN US ... ON THE FREETHOUGHT TRAIL! WWW.FREETHOUGHT-TRAIL.ORG

MEET THE SPONSOR
NEW JERSEY SURGEON
SPONSORS 2012 SEASON

Chalk it up to something Robert Green Ingersoll would understand: the power of the word.

“By way of background, 2010 had been a dramatic year,” recalled Tom Flynn, director of the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum. “The furnace and the roof needed replacing, one after the other. We launched an emergency appeal to fund those repairs so it would not be necessary to go into the Museum’s small endowment, and our supporters really came through in mid-2010. So I suppose as we went into 2011, there was an issue with donor fatigue.” Response to last year’s spring fund appeal was startlingly small, and as the 2011 season progressed there was real concern that the Museum might go into deficit, in which case it might not have opened at all in 2012. “I wrote an impassioned fall appeal letter,” Flynn recalled. “I laid out what was fast becoming a desperate situation and implied Ingersoll aficionados to respond.”

Response they did—none more than Jersey City, New Jersey, bariatric surgeon Michael Bilof, who made gifts totaling $15,000, underwriting the entire costs of the Museum’s 2012 season.

“W ell, it worked,” said Dr. Bilof of that late-2011 appeal. “I decided this would be one of my larger charitable gifts of that year.” Bilof is a longtime subscriber to Free Inquiry magazine and a regular contributor to the Council for Secular Humanism and its supporting organization, the Center for Inquiry. But never before had he made a contribution on this scale.

Interestingly, Dr. Bilof reports no special link to Ingersoll. And he’s never visited the Museum, “though I think I’ll try to this year,” he says wryly. He traces his emergence as a secular humanist—and his connection to the Council—to reading Carl Sagans’ 1997 book The Demon-Haunted World: Science As a Candle in the Dark, which mentioned the organization. In 2011, he recounts, “I put my money where my mouth is.”

The Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum is grateful and proud to acknowledge Dr. Bilof as the sponsor of the 2012 Museum season. A plaque acknowledging his generosity has been sent to his home, and a second plaque will be on permanent display at the Museum thanking him for his season sponsorship.

The Museum is located at 61 Main Street, Dresden, N.Y. (518)356-1074, seasonal-only. For correspondence to Robert Green Ingersoll Memorial Committee, Box 664, Amherst, N.Y. 14226-0664 (716)608-7571, ext. 213 or (716)608-1733. The Council for Secular Humanism is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization. Contributions are fully tax-deductible as allowed by law. www.secularhumanism.org/ingersoll
Copies of this 13” Ingersoll bust, mass-produced in the early twentieth century, are relatively common. By contrast the Museum’s new 28” bust was made arrangements for it to be repaired and refinished at the Art Conservation Clinic of Buffalo State College. Before doing so, he scrutinized the bust closely. The back of the bust bore three faint but still-readable inscriptions. Across the shoulder blades was the word “Ingersoll” in tall outlined letters. Along the bottom, left and right, respectively, were inscribed “M. A. Breed Sc.” and “1873.” Based on well-known photographs of Ingersoll, the amount of hair shown on the bust is consistent with that year, when Ingersoll was forty. But who was M. A. Breed, and when did he have artistic skills? On the other hand, the biography does not indicate that M. A. Breed learned the drug business with Dr. Shaw in Fulton, New York, came west in 1848, clerked for J. G. McCreery, Rushville, Illinois, and subsequently for Dr. Hoffman, Quincy, Illinois; went to California in 1852, returned in 1857, settled in Peoria in the same year, sold out in 1867, went to Europe in 1868, opened in Chicago a fine store of fancy goods brought from Germany and Italy in 1869, sold out and returned to Peoria in 1871, where he now resides, and has the credit of having the finest store of fine arts and fancy goods west of the Allegheny Mountains.

Inscription by the dealer and perhaps the sculptor, Peoria art dealer M. A. Breed.

Research by indefatigable volunteer (and Ingersoll family descendant) Jeff Ingersoll and Center for Inquiry Libraries Director Timothy Bings have pierced the secrets of this hitherto-undocumented work of art. After the bust was displayed “as is” during the Museum’s 2011 season, Jeff Ingersoll made arrangements for it to be repaired and refinished at the Art Conservation Clinic of Buffalo State College. Before doing so, he scrutinized the bust closely. The back of the bust bore three faint but still-readable inscriptions. Across the shoulder blades was the word “Ingersoll” in tall outlined letters. Along the bottom, left and right, respectively, were inscribed “M. A. Breed Sc.” and “1873.” Based on well-known photographs of Ingersoll, the amount of hair shown on the bust is consistent with that year, when Ingersoll was forty. But who was M. A. Breed, and why would he sculpt, much less cast, a bust of Robert Ingersoll at a time when the Great Agnostic had not yet achieved nationwide prominence? Three years before his “Plumed Knight” speech nominating James G. Blaine at the 1876 Republican National Convention in Cincinnati would make him a national figure, Ingersoll was already prominent and revered in his adopted hometown of Peoria, Illinois. Here, after all, he had raised his Civil War regiment and earned his lifelong title of Colonel Ingersoll. Here, in 1873, he was still engaged in the practice of law.

As it happens, M. A. Breed was also a Peorian in 1873.

Breed’s story comes from an 1892 genealogical work, A Record of the Descendants of Alien Breed, Who Came to America from England in 1830, published by Hathaway and Brothers of Philadelphia.

M. A. Breed learned the drug business with Dr. Shaw in Fulton, New York, came west in 1848, clerked for J. G. McCreery, Rushville, Illinois, and subsequently for Dr. Hoffman, Quincy, Illinois; went to California in 1852, returned in 1857, settled in Peoria in the same year, sold out in 1867, went to Europe in 1868, opened in Chicago a fine store of fancy goods brought from Germany and Italy in 1869, sold out and returned to Peoria in 1871, where he now resides, and has the credit of having the finest store of fine arts and fancy goods west of the Allegheny Mountains.

The story of the twenty-eight-inch bust can now be inferred. Breed, Peoria’s leading art dealer, either commissioned or sculpted a bust of Robert Ingersoll. That may have been the end of it, or a small number of plaster copies may have been offered on the local or, at most, statewide market. Did Breed hire an unknown artist, or was he himself the sculptor? His biography describes him as an art dealer but does not hint that he had artistic skills. On the other hand, the biography does not indicate the attainment of any license, degree, or professional certificate that might account for the “Sc.” inscribed after Breed’s name on the back of the bust. Perhaps it was meant to indicate that Breed himself was the sculptor.

In any case, the mysteries surrounding the only known Ingersoll bust of this size are largely solved. The bust was indeed sculpted early in Ingersoll’s life, in Peoria, the only place where anyone might have been interested in a bust of Robert Ingersoll at that early stage in his career. The bust’s promoter (and perhaps its sculptor) was in Peoria at that time and marketing of an Ingersoll bust would have dovetailed perfectly with his line of work. Finally, the fact that this bust would have been a product of only local or regional appeal helps to account for its rarity.

It is expected that Buffalo State College will finish restoration of the bust at some time during the 2012 season, and that the restored bust will go back on display in the Robert Green Ingersoll Birthplace Museum as soon as practical thereafter.

SEE IT AT THE INGER-HUT

Acquired from an online seller in 2011, this 4-1/4” × 6-1/2” “cabinet card” dates from the very early twentieth century. It was issued by the American Secular Union, one of the principal national nontheist organizations of the period. The card shows a composite image: a seated group of freethinkers, including Ingersoll, and above it the Dobbs Ferry, New York, mansion where Ingersoll died. Captioned on the back, the card notes (helpfully if ungrammatically) that “The two lower windows to the left is [sic] the room in which he died.”

Captions also name the seven individuals sitting for the group photo: It is unknown on what occasion they were photographed. The sitters are:

[top row, left to right]
1. E. M. Sellon
2. W. S. Bell
3. H. L. Green
4. Mrs. E. M. Sellon
5. Robert Green Ingersoll
6. Mrs. H. L. Green

ốt dòng số liệu